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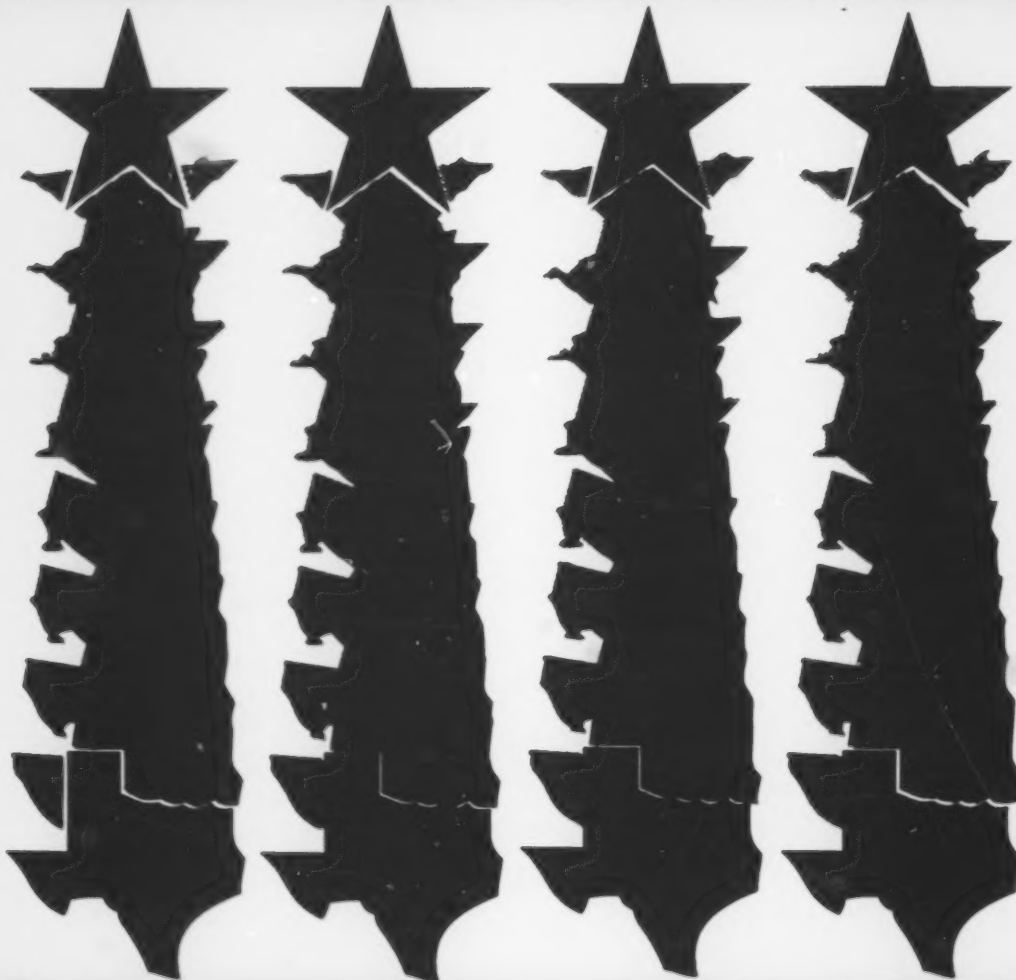
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ABSTRACT

This document presents recommendations to the Texas state legislature for meeting a 1997-98 goal of reducing the projected longitudinal and cross-sectional state dropout rates. Data for 1986 indicate that approximately 86,000 students were dropping out of Texas schools every year. The recommendations presented here were determined: (1) by tracing dropout rate reduction efforts in Texas from a historical perspective; (2) by an examination of the findings of major national reports and recent comprehensive plans from other states; and (3) by a review of the research literature concerning best educational practices for students at risk of dropping out of school. The resulting 19 recommendations address changes in statute, policies, funding resources and programs in the following areas: (1) attendance and driver's license eligibility rules; (2) changes in at-risk identification criteria; (3) a state media task force on dropouts; (4) improved dropout rate reporting; (5) enhancing leadership and interagency cooperation; (6) support for educational policy and practice issues; (7) elementary education through multi-age classrooms, guidance counselors, continuous progress, and cooperative learning; (8) enhancement of middle grade education through implementing recommendations of a national study; and (9) improvement of high school education through alternative education, immigrant students and teen parent initiatives. Thirty-nine references are appended. (JB)

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THE STATE PLAN TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE

FROM THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

UD 028 380

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From the State Board of Education

**Submitted to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor,
And the Seventy-Second Texas Legislature**

1990-1991

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March 1991

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Texas Education Code §11.205(d), Dropout Reduction Program, requires the Texas Education Agency to write a plan to reduce both the state's cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to not more than 5 percent by 1997-1998. This plan is the first in a series to be submitted to the legislature. This and subsequent plans, submitted each odd-numbered year, will be the blueprint for reducing the state's longitudinal dropout rate from current estimates of 31 percent to not more than 5 percent in 1997-1998.

Also required was a report of (1) the current dropout rate of students in grades 7-12 in the aggregate and by grade level and (2) projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates for those grades for the next five years, assuming no action is taken by the state to reduce the rate. Data which recently became available are being tabulated and summarized and will be transmitted under separate cover.

The report makes a series of recommendations for reducing the dropout rate and represents an investment in the future economic development of the state. A February 1991 summary of a report by the IBM Corporation estimated that if the dropout rate does not change, \$5,014,600,098 in new tax revenues will have to be generated annually to cover the cost impact of dropouts by the year 2004. However, if the graduation rate were increased from 63.7 percent to 90 percent by the year 2004 the increased taxable income would generate approximately \$7 billion in new tax revenues annually. A positive potential economic impact to the state for this investment is \$12 billion. Another study conducted in 1986 estimated a cost of over \$17 billion to the state for every group of seventh grade students who dropped out before graduating. These costs were in lost tax revenues, increased welfare, unemployment, and crime-related costs.

The State Board of Education recommends implementation of The State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Honea Crawford, Chairman
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 70th Texas Legislature mandated the Texas Education Agency to prepare biennial reports on the number of dropouts from the public school system and to provide each session of the legislature with a plan for meeting a 1997-98 goal of reducing the projected longitudinal and cross-sectional state dropout rates to not more than 5 percent. *The State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* is one component of the required report.

In 1986 the first available data indicated that approximately 86,000 students were dropping out of Texas schools every year and that over time nearly one-third of each cohort of 7th grade students would drop out before graduating from high school. The cost to the state was estimated at more than 17 billion dollars over the lifetime of each group of dropouts. The statistics indicated that Texas had the fifth highest dropout rate in the nation.

Heightened awareness of the school dropout problem and the resulting statewide actions have progressed at an accelerated rate, and Texas has made significant strides in addressing its dropout problem. Although current annual reports of the numbers of dropouts and governmental and public support are encouraging, improvements are called for at various levels. The adjustments necessary to maintain the current state and local efforts in Texas are presented as a set of recommendations contained in the plan.

The recommendations presented in the plan were determined by first tracing dropout rate reduction efforts in Texas from an historical perspective, including statistical reports, legislative action and the State Board of Education's *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-95*. This step was followed by an examination of the findings of major national reports and recent comprehensive plans from other states and a review of the research literature concerning best educational practices for students at risk of dropping out of school.

The process resulted in the 19 recommendations which address changes in statute, policies, funding resources, and programs which are needed in order to achieve the dropout reduction goal. In the area of legislation, the recommendations address the attendance and driver's license eligibility rules, changes in at-risk identification criteria, the need for appointing the state media task force on dropouts, and improvements in dropout rate reporting. Recommendations in the area of coordination and collaboration focus upon enhancing the agency's role in the areas of leadership and interagency cooperation, in order to provide school districts with comprehensive technical assistance.

Across general educational policy and practice, the recommendations prioritize support for mentorship, cross-cultural communication, minority teacher representation, and inter-district and intra-district transitions. Recommended strategies for elementary schools are multi-age primary classrooms, guidance counselors, and continuous progress and cooperative learning approaches. At the middle school level, the recommendations endorse conclusions from *Turning Points* and agency efforts in implementing the findings of this important national study. Recommendations at the high school level concern alternative education, teen parents, flexible scheduling and award of credit, post-secondary transitions, and programs for recent immigrant students.

A state advisory panel met to identify barriers to achieving the dropout reduction goal and to finalize the recommendations. The funding amounts specified in the recommendations were derived from estimates of local costs provided by the panel members and from analyses of similar actions undertaken by the agency. The recommendations provide the blueprint for actions to be undertaken by the legislature, the board, the agency, and other entities in order to achieve the state's dropout rate reduction goal.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of equal educational opportunity has recently translated into public concern about the growing number of high school dropouts. National concern about high school graduation rates has risen, partly due to increased accountability demands upon the public education system, media attention on dropouts, and the need for a skilled work force that can compete in an increasingly global economy. The implementation of academic reform measures in many states has also served to focus attention on the issue of high school dropouts as indicators of systemic failure.

In Texas, heightened awareness of the problem of school dropouts may be traced to 1986 when statistics became available which indicated that approximately 80,000 students dropped out of Texas public schools every year and that over time nearly one-third of each cohort of seventh grade students would drop out before graduating. The cost to the state was estimated at over \$17 billion over the lifetime of each group of dropouts in lost tax revenues and increased welfare, unemployment and crime-related expenses (Inter-cultural Development Research Association, 1986). The numbers indicated that the state had the fifth highest dropout rate in the nation.

Soon after, with the passage of House Bill 1010, the 70th Texas Legislature mandated the Texas Education Agency to prepare biennial reports on the number of dropouts and to provide each session of the legislature with a plan for reducing the projected longitudinal dropout rate to less than 5 percent. Accompanying legislation and subsequent rule adoption have progressed at an accelerated pace, and the state is considered to be at the nation's forefront in addressing the dropout problem (MDC, 1988). Although current annual reports of the number of dropouts are encouraging and governmental and public support is strong, improvements are called for in policy and program development to achieve the dropout rate reduction goal.

The achievement of Texas' dropout reduction goal will result in an estimated additional 259,640 students in the state's public education system by the 1995-96 school year. The cost of educating these students, with respect to additional personnel and facilities, is calculated by the Texas Education Agency Division of Resource Planning to be \$1.5 billion. However, figures reported in the *Texas School Dropout Survey Project* (1986) indicate that each dollar invested in the education of potential dropouts will yield a return of nine dollars. This savings results from decreased costs with respect to welfare, crime and incarceration, unemployment insurance and placement, adult training and education, and increased revenues with respect to additional taxes. Thus the estimated investment of \$1.5 billion will be highly cost effective with respect to projected future savings in state revenues.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE DROPOUT RATE REDUCTION

A set of six general principles of effective dropout rate reduction forms the basis of this plan. These principles are discussed as follows.

1. High Expectations

Dropout rate reduction is based on the fundamental premise that all children can learn and succeed in school.

A free, equitable, and appropriate public education should be available to all students. When the educational system values and enhances the diversity and uniqueness of all students, the promise of equal educational

opportunity can be fulfilled. Schools cannot excuse their failure to educate children because of the characteristics of a group to which students may belong (social, gender, race, or ethnicity) or because of their unique characteristics as individuals such as learning style and functional level. When learning is structured to promote comprehensive development within each child of a full range of cognitive skills across academic, vocational, social, emotional, physical, and aesthetic needs, both the individual and society benefit.

To establish and maintain the expectation that all students can learn requires an attitudinal commitment to the accurate assessment of student needs, adaptive instructional methodologies, and systemic accountability. When, in the complexity of schooling, a mismatch occurs between student needs and the educational process, the results are often measured in terms of the number of students who disengage from the system.

2. Teacher/Administrator Renewal

A comprehensive teacher/administrator system must be launched to train teachers and administrators who are already in the system to more effectively reach all students and to recruit new, especially minority, administrators and teachers.

Although parents and peers strongly influence students' attitudes toward school, the competencies of school personnel to recognize, respect and support individual differences in learning can have a profound influence on how students see themselves in relation to school. The state education agency, teacher-training institutions, and school districts must work together to recruit/prepare educational professionals who can meet the multiple needs of at-risk students. Staff development to identify and develop such competencies can be a critical part of dropout prevention. The involvement of teaching staff in educational decision-making leads to responsible professionalism directly related to dropout reduction.

3. Barriers in Policies and Practices

Educational policies and practices that act as barriers to student success must be eliminated or revised.

Educational policies are generally enacted to solve particular problems: students dropping out of school, misbehavior, truancy, and teenage parenthood. Sometimes these policies have unintentional effects that adversely affect the very students they were intended to serve. Critical points that have a bearing on the effect of a policy on students lie not only in the policy's major provisions, but in the interpretation and implementation of the policy at the state agency, district, or campus level.

4. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of schools must be adapted to accommodate the diverse academic and social needs of students.

Accountability for student success from day-to-day, year-to-year, grade-to-grade, and campus-to-campus provides a continuity which is the most effective weapon against the uncertainty, fragmentation, and mobility facing many students in contemporary society. When schools adapt to the needs of students, effort is required to ensure that configurations of place, time and personnel are structured to promote student success. The size of campuses, the inflexibility of school hours, and the rigidity of class scheduling can be problematic in high schools, junior high schools, and middle schools. At the elementary level, the predominant practice of grouping students close to the same age together in a single classroom under the direction of one teacher for the entire day creates an environment in which school success can be

an either/or proposition. When these structures are critically examined, methods for promoting humanistic, caring, and authentic education become natural and practical. Organizational models of effectiveness directed toward the needs of students, rather than institutions, can provide solutions.

5. Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies that enhance student success from prekindergarten to graduation must be used in the classroom.

Current research, field tests, successful pilot programs, demonstration sites, and system-wide implementations indicate that student achievement can be dramatically increased through appropriate methodologies. Variations in the style, pace, and culture by which students best learn are natural and inevitable. When the techniques for instruction are adapted to these differences, all students may succeed. Instructional strategies that modify methods and/or materials, use an array of multisensory and tactile teaching strategies, and pace instruction appropriately may insure greater success for all types of student learners. When instruction is primarily oriented to certain kinds of learners, it is guaranteed that some students will fail. Visual learners, for example, may not benefit in lecture-oriented classrooms. When the assessment of student progress is infrequent and based upon single observations rather than multiple measures that tap the many dimensions of students' intellectual abilities, academic failure is predetermined. Teacher training in the use of a variety of multisensory instructional strategies and assessment procedures that incorporate several data sources to measure student progress is critical to enhance student success.

6. Parent/Community Collaboration

Collaborative arrangements between parents, schools, community agencies and businesses are necessary for successful dropout reduction programs.

In fostering greater parental, community, and business interaction, schools can form alliances which ensure that barriers to educational success which are external to the school are minimized. In forming collaborative partnerships with private industry and higher education, schools increase the availability of human and financial resources. In coordinating with a variety of state and community agencies in the use of school sites as family support services delivery centers, schools increase overall systemic efficiency and reaffirm their historic roles in community development.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BIENNIUM

The principles discussed in this plan are the basis for achieving the long-term goal of dropout reduction. Interim recommendations for the biennium are listed according to these principles. The recommendations contained in this section of the plan identify any adjustments necessary to strengthen the current dropout reduction effort in Texas. The recommendations are the result of a process which began with an examination of the dropout issue from an historical perspective, including analyses of the statistical issues related to achieving the goal and the impact of legislative action and statewide planning efforts. The recommendations were developed after an analysis of the findings of national reports, a review of dropout reduction plans from other states, and a review of major research articles.

An advisory panel of educational practitioners, including superintendents, central office administrators, guidance counselors, at-risk coordinators, principals, teachers, and representatives from higher education provided additional direction and met as a group to identify barriers to achieving the dropout reduction goal and to finalize the recommendations. Funding amounts specified for the fiscal implications were derived from estimates of local costs provided by the practitioners and from analyses of similar actions undertaken by the agency. Actions to be undertaken by the legislature, the board, the agency, and other entities are stated and offer a blueprint for achieving the dropout rate reduction goal.

PRINCIPLE 1: HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Recommendation 1

The school-based services currently offered to teenage mothers should be increased to include teen parents, and the capability of such programs to provide cross-generational services should be enhanced.

The Problem

The high teen pregnancy rate in Texas is both a correlate and determinant of the substantial dropout rate. Senate Bill 1 has significantly altered the possibility of the continuation of services now in operation, while provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988 mandate the expansion of school-based child care.

The Solution

Amend TEC §16.152, *Compensatory Education Allotment*, to include pregnancy and parenting, permit the expenditure of state funds for approved support services, and authorize the State Board of Education to adopt rules for the administration of the School-Age Pregnancy and Parenting Program. Amend the at-risk criteria contained in 19 TAC §75.195, relating to *Alternatives to Social Promotion*, to include pregnancy and parenthood in order to better serve this population.

Fiscal Implications

Cost estimates are based upon analyses of 22 pilot sites of the School-Age Pregnancy and Parenting Program. The cost projections assume that 27,500 students are in need of such support programs each year and that the programs achieve full implementation by steady expansion over the next four years. Additionally, under the current special education program for pregnant students, approximately 5,650 students are being served at an annual cost of \$2.6 million. Accordingly, the increased cost of this program would be approximately \$110 million for the 1991-93 biennium.

Recommendation 2

Funding should be provided for programs which meet the unique academic needs of secondary students of limited English proficiency who are newcomers to the Texas public school system.

The Problem	Whether in urban areas, border regions, or isolated rural communities, secondary schools are struggling with the need to adapt instructional programs to the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds of immigrant youth.
The Solution	Provide funding for newcomer programs based on need. There are an estimated 5,247 secondary students who are new immigrants this school year. They are concentrated in 70 school districts throughout the state. Based on an estimated amount of \$1,400 per student as recommended by Title VII, United States Department of Education guidelines, the amount of funding needed to implement newcomer programs is \$14,691,600.
Fiscal Implications	\$14,691,600 for the biennium.

Recommendation 3

Responsible Education: A Coordinated Plan to Successfully Educate Students Whose School Success Has Not Been Adequately Assured Through General Education, a plan to address barriers to achieving educational excellence for all students, should be funded.

The Problem	Fiscal support is needed to implement <i>Responsible Education: A Coordinated Plan to Successfully Educate Students Whose School Success Has Not Been Adequately Assured Through General Education</i> . The plan has been formulated to promote educator responsibility at all levels through providing leadership, staff development, and technical support to school districts in (1) identifying and providing appropriate services to students; (2) improving the function and impact of assessment instruments; (3) adapting special programs to meet student needs; (4) enlisting the support of other agencies to foster greater parental, community, and business interaction with schools and students; and (5) assessing the focus of districts' efforts on behalf of students whose school success has not been adequately assured through traditional education programs. An evaluation of expected outcomes is included as a component of the plan.
The Solution	Fund <i>Responsible Education: A Coordinated Plan to Successfully Educate Students Whose School Success Has Not Been Adequately Assured Through General Education</i> .
Fiscal Implications	\$3,300,000 for the biennium.

PRINCIPLE 2: TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR RENEWAL_____

Recommendation 4

Programs should be funded that maintain and increase the number of minority teachers and administrators to reflect the ethnic composition of the state.

The Problem	High dropout rates and underrepresentation among professional educators are two characteristics of minority populations, and the two problems are interdependent. Effective models have been identified, but funding is no longer available for the continuation of these successful efforts.
The Solution	Promote minority teacher retention and recruitment through the funding and support of induction year programs and partnerships between the agency, school districts, and teacher training institutions.
Fiscal Implications	\$35,000,000 for the biennium, among the state's teacher training programs.

Recommendation 5

Regional training and technical assistance should be provided to school district at-risk coordinators concerning their institutional roles, responsibilities, and resources.

The Problem	The passage of Senate Bills 1 and 152, and the resulting changes in the Texas Education Code, have increased the duties required of district at-risk coordinators as a result of mandates for extensive documentation, planning, implementation, evaluation, and administrative-level coordination with state compensatory education programs and data collection for the Public Education Information Management System. Increased accountability at the local level now includes dropout and graduation rate indicators within the performance-based accreditation process and also links district level dropout rate reduction goals to state compensatory education funding. Successful models and programs in dropout prevention have been identified throughout the state, but wide variation exists among districts' efforts and compliance toward the state's dropout rate reduction objectives. Technical assistance provided at the regional level for at-risk coordinators would provide information and training about successful programs and programmatic requirements.
The Solution	Provide funding for 10, week-long regional summer institutes for at-risk coordinators for training and regulatory, fiscal, and programmatic technical assistance.
Fiscal Implications	\$1,035,000 for 10 institutes during the biennium, to serve approximately 200 persons per institute. These funds could be included within a comprehensive staff development package in the State Board of Education finance plan, as recommended by the board towards settlement of the <i>Edgewood v. Kirby</i> case.

Recommendation 6

Strategies should be implemented for improving communication between teachers/administrators and the at-risk students they serve.

The Problem	The cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills required for school success which characterize mainstream populations are not part of the repertoire of large portions of the at-risk population. Teachers and administrators often lack awareness of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds and abilities of at-risk students.
The Solution	Improve communication skills in the educational environment by providing both explicit instruction in school culture as part of the curriculum and staff development in the understanding and appreciation of socio-linguistic diversity.
Fiscal Implications	None (included in the teacher/renewal appropriation).

PRINCIPLE 3: BARRIERS IN POLICIES AND PRACTICES _____

Recommendation 7

Existing at-risk entrance program criteria should be reviewed for uniformity and consistency across grade levels, and exit criteria should be established.

The Problem	TEC §21.557(f), relating to <i>Remedial and Compensatory Education</i> , resulted in the revision of rules for the identification of at-risk students at the secondary level and the addition of criteria at the elementary level. The result is a mismatch of identifiers relating to retention, academic performance on norm-referenced testing, language proficiency, abuse, and delinquent conduct. Rules and guidelines do not exist for exit criteria at either level.
The Solution	Amend 19 TAC §75.195, relating to <i>Alternatives to Social Promotion</i> , and TEC §21.557(f), relating to <i>Remedial and Compensatory Education</i> , to provide for unified and consistent entrance and exit criteria for identifying and serving at-risk students in Grades Pre-K-12.
Fiscal Implications	None.

Recommendation 8

A process of critically assessing the impact that policies and practices have on students is needed in order to eliminate the barriers to student success which result in dropout behaviors.

The Problem	Educational policies such as the 80 day attendance statute (TEC §21.041, relating to <i>Absences</i>) and the driver's license statute (Article 66876, <i>Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes</i>) were enacted to encourage student attendance and to discourage students from dropping out of school before graduating. A current evaluation study by the Texas Education Agency indicates that ongoing research on the impact of educational policies and practices on student success is needed.
The Solution	Fund an ongoing study of the impact of dropout prevention legislation on student success.
Fiscal Implications	None (this research may be funded through federal Chapter 2 monies).

PRINCIPLE 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE _____

Recommendation 9

Amend TEC §21.031(d), relating to *Admission*, by adding a provision that a student's eligibility to attend public school in a particular district be determined on an individual basis and by requiring only reasonable evidence, given the financial, social, and personal situation of the student or the student's caregiver.

The Problem	An increasing number of students live in nontraditional family structures. Children who do not live with their parents are sometimes denied enrollment because of local policies that require non-parental caregivers to obtain legal custody as a condition of school enrollment. In such cases, school districts choose to assume
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that any child who is not living with a legal guardian is living in the district for the primary purpose of attending school. For many children, the assumption is false. The costs of obtaining legal custody may exceed the means of many non-parental caregivers. Thus, students may be forced to drop out of school because their non-parental caregivers cannot afford to obtain legal custody.

The Solution

Amend TEC §21.031(d) by adding the following sentence at the end: "The determination of an applicant's reasons for residing in the school district must be made on an individual basis and should require only reasonable evidence, given the financial, social, and personal situation of the student or the student's caregiver." This amendment would decrease the number of students who are kept out of school because they live with a relative who cannot afford to acquire legal custody. The amendment would be consistent with the agency's goal of eliminating barriers that prevent student success.

Fiscal Implications None.

Recommendation 10

Mentorship, whether through role-modeling by community members, cross-age tutoring, peer tutoring, or staff involvement should be implemented at campuses in districts where the dropout rate exceeds the state's goal for that year.

The Problem

Although mentorship is a cost-efficient solution for student disengagement and campus-level programs have demonstrated successful results, the strategy remains underutilized.

The Solution

Provide the resources for a mentorship program at each eligible campus based on the number of campuses that fall below 40 percent mastery of all state assessment tests taken. Preliminary results of the state assessment program indicate that approximately 50 percent of all students at the fifth, seventh, and ninth grades failed to master all three tests. At the third grade, an estimated 33 percent of the students did not master the test. Funding for a mentorship program includes \$10,000 for a coordinator to work part-time at the rate of two periods per school day and \$5,000 for materials per year. Based on an estimated number of 1,407 campuses that are most in need, the amount of funds necessary to fund a mentorship program is \$21,105,000 per year.

Fiscal Implications \$42,210,000 per biennium. Projected increases in the state compensatory education allotment may allow for the financing of mentorship programs.

Recommendation 11

Each school district should identify and implement strategies to reduce the difficulties students experience in the transitions from early childhood programs to the primary level, from upper-elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school, from high school to post-secondary education or employment, and in the processes of inter-district transfers and dropout recovery.

The Problem

The alienation, confusion, and anxiety which can characterize transfers from one educational setting to another often provide the immediate catalyst for the decision to drop out.

The Solution Amend TEC §21.557, relating to *Remedial and Compensatory Instruction*, to include programs and strategies for successful transitions of students from one campus to another, including the identification of examples such as support groups, among the services districts are required to implement for students at risk of dropping out of school.

Fiscal Implications None.

Recommendation 12

Guidelines, rules, and funds should be provided for the implementation of ungraded primary (Pre-K through Grade 3) configurations.

The Problem The message that success in school will not be part of their future is received by at-risk students early in their school careers. Retention, whether used for enrichment or as an at-risk strategy, is a decision which seeks to adapt the needs of the child to the inflexible structure of the school. The detrimental consequences of such messages to children are now seen in the correlation of retention and dropout rates.

The Solution Provide guidelines and rules to accommodate the diversity of developmental differences which characterize early childhood. Also provide funds for program planning and staff development activities to school districts that implement an ungraded primary campus.

Fiscal Implications \$10,000,000 for the biennium.

Recommendation 13

Funds should be provided for guidance programs on all elementary campuses.

The Problem Without early and appropriate intervention, the external pressures to which elementary school children are increasingly vulnerable result in underachievement, school disinterest, classroom disruption, truancy, and ultimately, in Grades 7-12, dropping out.

The Solution Provide funding to employ elementary counselors for the approximately 261,000 students on the 727 campuses which do not employ counselors. Based on the ratio of one counselor per 500 students, the 522 additional counselors will cost \$36,540,000 for the biennium.

Fiscal Implications \$36,540,000 for the biennium. These funds would be provided under the foundation school program.

Recommendation 14

Regulations providing for flexible scheduling and competency-based award of credit (19 TAC §75.169(b), relating to *Award of Credit, Grades Nine through Twelve*) should be more widely utilized by districts as dropout prevention and recovery strategies.

The Problem	Flexible scheduling, competency-based award of credit, and other means of earning course credit are authorized but underused in accommodating the diverse academic needs of at-risk secondary students, including those who are gifted and talented, and those who for economic reasons must accommodate the requirements of both school and employment.
The Solution	Identify secondary campuses which accommodate flexible scheduling, competency-based award of credit, and other methods of award of credit within regular school settings and disseminate information to encourage widespread implementation by districts.
Fiscal Implications	None.

Recommendation 15

Technical preparation education programs developed as a result of consortiums between local education agencies and post-secondary institutions should be enhanced through legislation and fiscal change providing for (1) substitution of appropriate courses for graduation requirements; (2) funds to assist in start-up costs of such programs; (3) the expansion of 2 + 2 + 2 programs which promote linkages to higher education; and (4) vocational programs which promote apprenticeship education toward post-secondary employment planning.

The Problem	The expectation that academic training in high school connects to positive outcomes after graduation does not exist for many at-risk students or in the programs designed to serve them.
The Solution	Target the newly appropriated Carl D. Perkins federal vocational education funds to nontraditional school-to-work technical preparation programs, such as apprenticeship education, in order to increase the options available to at-risk students.
Fiscal Implications	Unknown (to be based on staff recommendations after final regulations are approved).

PRINCIPLE 5: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Recommendation 16

Alternative instructional approaches such as continuous progress, accelerated learning strategies, and alternative academic campuses should be fostered through fiscal incentives.

The Problem	In districts where dropout rates exceed the state average, retention and underachievement levels of more than two years characterize one-fourth to one-third of student enrollment by the sixth grade. At the middle and high school levels, the large campuses found in urban areas contribute to student disengagement and alienation. In rural areas, students who require additional services in order to be successful are often underserved due to a lack of enrollment necessary to operate alternative programs in a more cost effective manner.
The Solution	Establish an incentive fund to stimulate the assessment and implementation of alternative instructional approaches in districts where dropout rates exceed the state average.

Fiscal Implications \$5,000,000 for each biennium (these activities are funded by the legislature for the current biennium through the Public Education Development Fund).

Recommendation 17

Legislation and funding should be provided to support initiatives reflecting recommendations in the national study, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. A discussion of these recommendations is contained in the section titled "Future Directions."

The Problem The dropout data for Texas indicate an urgent need for change at the middle school level to adapt school structure and practices to the developmental needs of this age group. A Texas task force has been formed to assess the implications of *Turning Points*, a national study by the Carnegie Foundation. The study's premise is that a mismatch exists between the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents and the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools.

The Solution Provide legislation and funding to support initiatives and sites reflecting the findings of *Turning Points* endorsed by the Task Force on Middle School Education.

Fiscal Implications Unknown (to be based upon recommendations of the task force and resulting agency action).

PRINCIPLE 6: PARENT/COMMUNITY COLLABORATION_____

Recommendation 18

The capability of media to enhance public awareness of dropout prevention issues and strategies should be enhanced. The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House should appoint the *Statewide Media Task Force on Dropout Prevention* authorized by the 71st Texas Legislature.

The Problem The use of a statewide media campaign to increase public commitment to dropout rate reduction would constitute an important strategy. The benefits of parental and community involvement could be enhanced through the prioritization by a media task force of the recruitment of volunteers for mentorship activities and the creation of a toll-free hotline for parents and students. The *Statewide Media Task Force on Dropout Prevention* called for in HCR 107 has not yet been appointed. The actions of the task force should reflect an assessment of the impact of the media on the educational aspirations of school personnel, students, and their families.

The Solution Appoint the *Statewide Media Task Force on Dropout Prevention* and provide start-up support in terms of informational materials and technical assistance by Texas Education Agency staff.

Fiscal Implications None.

Recommendation 19

Existing models for effective programs which explore collaboration with community agencies to implement comprehensive dropout prevention and recovery programs for at-risk students and their parents (including health, job training, and social services) should provide the basis for widespread implementation through fiscal support.

The Problem	The problems which compel a student to drop out may be medical, social, and/or economic rather than academic in origin. Demonstration projects have been conducted and assessed in accord with comprehensive and collaborative inter-agency models, but funding support is required for increased dissemination and implementation.
The Solution	Fund demonstration and existing projects which provide examples of the coordination of services between state and community agencies and educational institutions.
Fiscal Implications	\$7,500,000 for the biennium (these funds have already been appropriated for the current biennium by the legislature through the Public Education Development Fund).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section, the history of dropout prevention and recovery efforts in Texas from 1984 until the present are discussed. Initial actions such as legislative requirements for the collection of dropout statistics, the resulting dropout reduction legislation and accompanying State Board of Education rules, and the state's dropout statistics which reflect these efforts, are utilized as the historical background for the present status of dropout prevention and recovery initiatives. Current efforts, including recent legislation, the State Board of Education's long-range plan, the agency's plan for responsible education for all students, and current dropout statistics are presented in order to depict the present status of the state's dropout reduction initiatives.

INITIAL ACTIONS: INITIAL STATISTICS

House Bill 72, passed by the Texas Legislature in 1984, mandated sweeping reforms in the state's public education system. This legislation addressed several aspects of the dropout issue. One section of the bill states, "... the Texas Education Agency may develop a program to reduce the rate of students leaving the public school system before completing high school in order to reduce the statewide dropout rate to not more than five percent of the student population."

House Bill 72 also contained a directive to the Texas Department of Community Affairs to study the state's dropout problem. This effort, the *Texas School Dropout Survey Project*, culminated in a final report to the state legislature in December 1986. The major findings of this investigation include the following:

- The 1985-86 attrition rate for Texas public schools was 33 percent;
- Attrition rates differed markedly for the three major racial/ethnic groups in Texas: 27 percent for Whites, 34 percent for Blacks, and 45 percent for Hispanics;
- The majority of Texas dropouts left school because of poor grades, marriage/pregnancy, or financial problems; and
- Approximately 89 percent of the existing dropout programs in Texas had no evaluation data.

A follow-up to the *Texas School Dropout Survey Project*, reported in the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) newsletter (May 1988), found that the longitudinal (Grades 9-12) attrition rate in Texas had increased from 33 percent in 1985-86 to 34 percent in 1986-87. Longitudinal attrition rates by race/ethnicity in 1986-87 were 26 percent for Anglos, 38 percent for Blacks, and 46 percent for Hispanics.

House Bill 72 also directed the State Board of Education to develop a long-range plan for public education. The *1986-90 Long-Range Plan for Texas Public School Education* was adopted by the State Board of Education in January 1987. Goal 1 of this plan stated, "All students will be expected to meet or exceed educational performance standards." One objective of Goal 1 was to, "Establish programs to reduce the dropout rate and encourage higher attendance."

RESULTING ACTIONS: LEGISLATION AND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION RULES

In May 1987, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1010 which contained several requirements related to dropouts. House Bill 1010 directed the Texas Education Agency to undertake a number of activities,

including a dropout reduction program, a dropout data collection system, and a dropout information clearinghouse. This bill also required school districts to provide remedial and support programs for students who are at risk of dropping out of school and to designate one or more at-risk coordinators. House Bill 1010 became effective September 1, 1987.

In a related action, the State Board of Education amended 19 TAC §75.195, *Alternatives to Social Promotion*, to require school districts to adopt policies delineating services and programs for students at risk of dropping out of school and to provide academic options and services to them. Effective September 1, 1988, school districts were also required to have in place a plan to retain students in a school setting in Grades 1-12. This comprehensive statewide approach to dropout prevention and recovery placed Texas at the forefront of the nation's dropout prevention and recovery efforts. A national report, *America's Shame, America's Hope*, (MDC, 1988) identified Texas as one of 14 states to have addressed the dropout issue in a comprehensive and coordinated fashion.

Another initiative passed by the 70th Texas Legislature in 1987 was the establishment of the Joint Special Interim Committee on High School Dropouts. This committee, which was co-chaired by Senator Gonzalo Barrientos and Representative Ernestine Glossbrenner, held public hearings throughout the state to gather information on the dropout problem. The work of this committee resulted in *Report of the Joint Special Interim Committee on High School Dropouts*, which was presented to the 71st Texas Legislature. This report contained strategies which were incorporated into a number of new initiatives at the state and local levels.

In 1989, the 71st Texas Legislature continued its dropout prevention and recovery initiative through the passage of several new laws. Senate Bill 417, the sunset bill for the Texas Education Agency, included several provisions related to dropout prevention and recovery. This legislation required students to attend class at least 80 days per semester to receive course credit. Districts were required to appoint attendance committees to hear petitions for course credit from students with less than 80 days attendance. It raised the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17 and lowered the age at which students must begin school from seven to six. It included the effectiveness of a district's dropout prevention and recovery programs as part of the accreditation process. Senate Bill 417 also created the Educational Excellence Program for Texas to promote district flexibility in developing innovative programs and "second chance" awards programs for dropouts under the age of 19 who return to school. A number of pilot programs for at-risk youth were established as well.

Senate Bill 152, enacted by the 71st legislative session, required the State Board of Education to establish a statewide annual dropout reduction goal that reduces the state's dropout rate until a 5 percent longitudinal dropout rate is reached in the 1997-98 school year. This law also required school district at-risk coordinators to prepare an annual dropout reduction plan which includes the number of dropouts in the preceding year, the number of at-risk students in Grades PK-12, the district's dropout reduction goal for each school year, and the district's dropout prevention programs, strategies, and resources to be used during that year. Districts with an annual dropout rate exceeding the state's goal must spend a percentage of their state compensatory education funds on remedial and support programs for at-risk students the following year.

Senate Bill 1668 also contained a number of mandates related to dropouts and at-risk students. It expanded the criteria for identifying at-risk students to include Grades PK-6 and directed the State Board of Education to adopt rules under which a school district may use a community-based dropout recovery program to provide alternative education programs for at-risk youth. District attendance officers must now refer children voluntarily absent from school without parental consent to their county juvenile justice departments. In addition, school districts must notify parents of eligible three-year-olds about the availability of prekindergarten programs. The bill directed the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse to enter an interagency agreement to provide technical assistance to the 20 regional education service centers in developing substance abuse prevention and early intervention programs in the public schools.

One of the more widely publicized pieces of dropout prevention legislation passed in the 71st legislative session was Senate Bill 850, which requires a person under the age of 18 to either have a high school diploma or its equivalent or be currently enrolled in either a high school or equivalency exam program prior to the issuance of a driver's license, motorcycle license, or instruction permit.

RESULTING STATISTICS:

THE REPORT ON 1987-88 PUBLIC SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The *Report on 1987-88 Public School Dropouts*, published in May 1989, provided dropout information by race and ethnicity for Grades 7-12 at the campus, district, county, region, and state levels. It indicated that 87,803 students in Grades 7-12 dropped out of school in 1987-88. This figure translated to an annual statewide dropout rate of 6.4 percent. According to the report, annual dropout rates by ethnicity were 5 percent for Whites and 7.9 percent for Blacks. Hispanic students had the highest dropout rate in Texas with an annual figure of 8.6 percent. The difference between the 6.4 percent dropout rate contained in this report and the 33 percent dropout rate presented in the *Texas School Dropout Survey Project* was primarily due to reporting dropout statistics on an annual versus a longitudinal (four years) basis. More recent dropout statistics will be presented in a following section of this plan.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

SENATE BILL 1

In 1990, with the passage of Senate Bill 1, the 71st Texas Legislature Sixth Called Session continued to take actions which have placed Texas in the vanguard of dropout prevention initiatives by (1) putting in place an accreditation system holding school districts and individual campuses accountable for achieving dropout rate reduction goals; (2) specifying how such efforts are to be funded (including financial incentives); and (3) describing the characteristics of programmatic solutions.

THE TEXAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1991-1995

With each mandate from the legislature, the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Education have been proactive in responding to the dropout challenge: first, the *1986-1990 Long-Range Plan for Texas Public School Education*; then, in reiterating those goals in TAC §75.195, *Alternatives to Social Promotion*, in 1987; and finally in November 1990, the adoption of the document titled, *Texas State Board of Education Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-1995*.

The *Texas State Board of Education Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-1995* contains goals and objectives which reflect the philosophy that, "the chief responsibility of the education system, working in concert with parents, business, and the public, is to provide instruction and related support to school-age children." The plan was adopted by the State Board of Education in November 1990 with a mission of quality, equity, and accountability to be achieved through an evolving educational system that reflects vitality and energy in embracing the challenges of educating all children. The mandate to provide educational and support services for all school-age children is reflected in each of the nine goals. Each goal provides a framework for meeting the challenge of reducing the dropout rate. A review of these goals follows.

Goal 1 states that all students will achieve their full educational potential; therefore, all school-age children's needs will be addressed and met through the efforts of the educational system. This goal includes reducing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and other students, addressing different learning styles, and implementing dropout prevention and intervention strategies culminating in raising the graduation rate to 95 percent.

Goal 2 provides for innovative instructional strategies to be used with students at risk of dropping out of school. These students will have a greater opportunity to work within the educational system, resulting in a longer duration in school and more structured educational experience and training. Such a program can be successful only if it is provided by trained, qualified personnel.

Goal 3 calls for a trained work force. To meet students' needs, it is essential to have qualified personnel who are knowledgeable and effective in working with children. The implementation of a modified curriculum requires a team approach and commitment to the philosophy that all students can learn and that the school is responsible for matching various instructional techniques to students' abilities. Success and accountability are shared by all involved in the educational system.

Goal 4 outlines objectives to determine whether the educational system is working successfully. This goal establishes a management system to help organize and manage all levels of the educational system to assure productivity, efficiency, and accountability. The PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) provides rapid feedback to school districts on newly implemented strategies to help students. PEIMS enables the state to recognize those programs and districts which are most effective.

Financing for school districts is addressed in Goal 5. The goal states that the financing plan for the state's public education system will be adequate, equitable, and efficient.

Goals 6 and 7 discuss partnerships with schools and deal specifically with parental responsibility and community/business participation in the educational system. Goal 6 emphasizes the importance of parental responsibility and participation in their children's educational program. A partnership relationship with business and community groups is sought in Goal 7. One such endeavor has been the cooperation at the state level of the Texas Education Agency and Texas Department of Commerce in promoting partnerships with community-based organizations as well as business and industry in developing and implementing programs.

The last two goals address continued research and dissemination of information. Goal 8 encourages research and development to improve instruction and administrative efforts to ensure that the educational system is responsive to all students and that effective methodology is implemented. Goal 9 provides for a communication networking system to disseminate research information throughout the state so that effective strategies for students are available.

RESPONSIBLE EDUCATION

Within the Texas Education Agency, the plan, *Responsible Education: A Coordinated Plan to Successfully Educate Students Whose School Success Has Not Been Adequately Assured Through General Education*, has been formulated. In emphasizing the need for educator responsibility in meeting the challenge of the state's dropout reduction goal, the plan promotes the philosophy that all students can learn and all students can be successful when the educational system meets their needs. The plan addresses systemic solutions at all levels by providing leadership, staff development, and technical support to school districts in (1) identifying and providing appropriate services to students; (2) improving the function and impact of assessment instruments; (3) adapting special programs to meet student needs; (4) enlisting the support of other agencies to foster greater parental, community, and business interaction with schools and students; and (5) assessing the focus of districts' efforts on behalf of students whose school success has not been adequately assured through traditional education programs.

Adopting a management plan to promote systemic change in beliefs, values, and practices toward students who are leaving school at unacceptable rates will have both immediate and long-term benefits for achieving the dropout rate reduction goal. The plan outlines a process that is consistent with the implementation of the State Board of Education's goals and objectives in the *Texas State Board of Education Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-1995* by focusing initially on four areas: Attitude, Assessment, Adapta-

tion, and Accountability. Specific strategies, activities, and time lines are outlined in the plan, which will be submitted for approval to the State Board of Education.

CURRENT STATISTICS: 1988-89 REPORT ON PUBLIC SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The *1988-89 Report on Public School Dropouts* indicated the annual dropout rate for the state has been lowered to 6.1 percent, with 82,325 dropouts reported from a Grades 7-12 school population of 1,360,115 students. More Hispanic students dropped out of school than students from other ethnic groups: 33,421 students or 8.1 percent. Among Black students, an annual rate of 7.5 percent resulted from 14,525 dropouts. Anglo dropouts numbered 32,806 for an annual rate of 4.5 percent.

Comparative analysis of the data across school districts and grade levels from the *1988-89 Report on Public School Dropouts* reveals three significant trends:

1. High rates and large numbers of dropouts tend to be characteristic of large urban districts. Whether ranked by district size or by numbers of dropouts, the report supports the findings that the 20 largest districts provide half of the total number of dropouts in the state. Counts from an additional 80 districts bring the accumulation to 75 percent. In contrast, the 1988-89 count reveals that 297 districts have annual rates which project to longitudinal rates less than 5 percent and account for only 253 dropouts.
2. Dropout rates for the ninth grade in Texas are nearly triple those of seventh and eighth grades, and nearly double those of the twelfth grade. Half of all dropouts in the state do so before senior high school.
3. The differential dropout rates across ethnicities further define the problems associated with the second issue. The exaggeration of seventh through ninth grade dropout rates in Texas is even more pronounced for minorities. If a minority student completes the ninth grade, there is an increased likelihood of that student obtaining a high school diploma.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

DIRECTION FROM THE STATISTICS

A national goal of a 90 percent graduation rate has been set for the year 2000 and a 95 percent rate for the state of Texas has been adopted in the *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-1995*. If the 95 percent graduation rate is attained, the size of the state's graduating class will have increased by nearly half. In districts and among student groups where longitudinal attrition rates approach 50 percent, the number of graduates will nearly double; there will be over twice as many Native Americans and Hispanics graduating, and nearly that same increase for African-Americans. Fiscal benefits would accrue to large districts and those with the highest dropout rates because secondary enrollment increases, rather than declines, would occur. At the state level, the yearly increase in average daily attendance would be added to the increase contributed by population growth, and secondary enrollment would increase by nearly 5 percent.

Rather than ranking fifth from the bottom of the roster of the states which list graduation rates, Texas would be well above the national goal for the year 2000 and, as a result of having taken an early lead in planning efforts, could well rank first in the nation. The achievement could drive increased investment in the state by business and industry. Such benefits for the Texas economy, while considerable, would be less significant than the changes in the lives of the students involved. They would have futures much different from those that their current situation predicts.

In the fall of 1990, approximately 254,000 Texas children entered the fifth grade. The purpose of this document is to describe a plan which will result in less than five percent (12,700) of those students dropping out before graduation in May 1998 (the longitudinal rate) and in a total dropout rate for the 1997-98 school year of less than 5 percent of the student enrollment in Grades 7-12, or approximately 13,500 students (the cross-sectional rate).

In May 1990, the Texas Education Agency calculated the annual rate necessary to result in a 5 percent longitudinal rate in 1997-98. The rate, adopted by State Board of Education, is slightly less than 1 percent. The agency also calculated the reduction in the annual rate required to result in a 5 percent dropout rate by 1997-98 at .58 of a percentage point. In order to achieve this goal, the average annual dropout rate would need to be lowered to .85 percent or less across Grades 7-12, and the total number of dropouts could not total more than 13,500. Although nearly 10,000 fewer dropouts were reported between 1987-88 and 1988-89, there is little reason to believe that improved recordkeeping and tracking of students would be sustained at such a rate throughout the decade and continue to lower the count by 8,500 students during each of the next seven years.

DIRECTIONS FROM THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on dropouts indicates that the reasons for failing in school or dropping out are varied and complex. It appears that labels such as "dropout" and "at-risk" are, in fact, omnibus terms which describe a multiplicity of problems and processes in the lives of young people. No single entity, not the student, parents, teachers, school, or community, can be blamed for a student's failure to graduate. Likewise, no single strategy or program will resolve this problem. As Mann (1987) has stated, "If the problem is complex, so will be the solutions."

There are several characteristics common to successful dropout prevention and recovery programs. Most of them also can be used as guidelines to improve instruction for all children. Research summarized in

the Texas Education Agency's *Characteristics of At-Risk Youth* (1989, p. 66) indicates that successful dropout reduction programs:

- are voluntary;
- give teachers autonomy over program planning, membership, and evaluation;
- are small in size and local in scope;
- establish and maintain strong linkages between school and family;
- are characterized by a caring and attentive staff attuned to the students' personal needs (social, academic, and cultural);
- stress academic growth, and develop and deliver relevant curriculum which combines both academic and vocational components;
- are individualized around the particular needs of a school and of the students who participate in its programs;
- have faculty who exhibit high expectations for their students and establish specific time lines and goals for student performance;
- often serve to extend the traditional services provided by schools to meet the particular needs of non-traditional families and the work schedules of adolescents;
- create a different climate from that which typifies many mainstream educational programs; and
- establish strong linkages between schools and businesses.

The current literature on dropouts also demonstrates that strategies to improve the holding power of the school must be varied and appropriate to the needs of each student. State Board of Education rules 19 TAC §75.195(h) allow for local flexibility concerning the types of academic options and services provided to students. Research indicates that these initiatives are most successful when all members of the community—parents, community-based organizations, schools, social service agencies, and private industry—become active participants in dropout prevention and recovery.

NATIONAL STUDIES

This section summarizes the recommendations of recent major national studies relating to policymaking decisions at a variety of levels which have had significant influence. It also provides a background for the reviews of state plans and specific studies which are presented in the next sections.

Assuring Educational Success for Students At Risk. Council of Chief State Schools Officers. Washington, D.C., 1987.

This report calls for integrating support services and using effective schools correlates as alternatives to tracking, ability grouping, and pull-out programs, with emphasis upon the development of a repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive strategies focused upon problem solving. Effective environments for students would provide collaborative learning environments where skills are acquired as a means of learning content.

Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged. Center for Economic Development. New York, 1987.

This study recommends that 60 percent of each new dollar be spent on at-risk youth through the use of incentives and increased public awareness to combine work experience with education in basic skills; that such education operate in an alternative setting focusing on improving motivation, skills, and self-esteem; and that provisions be made for continuity of funding and long-term evaluation.

Educating Poor Minority Children. Scientific American, November 1988.

This milestone study concludes that, "... for poor children whose parents remain uninvolved, schools may have to come up with other answers," and advocates the role of schools as social centers. Noting that, "... even one relationship between an adult and a disadvantaged child in stressful conditions can make a difference," and that such intervention "helped the youngsters weather crises, gave them a sense of stability, and improved their sense of their own competence," the study makes a clear case for mentorship. The assertion is that schools should function as a community center linking a host of family support systems to help children overcome social, psychological, and health problems and become the focus of advocacy for children.

No Place to Call Home: Discarded Children in America. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families. Washington, D.C., 1989.

This report cites evidence on the deteriorating social environment in which children must function. It predicts that by 1995 nearly one million children will not be living with their parents. The report also states that the number of children in juvenile detention centers rose 27 percent between 1979 and 1987 and is expected to increase through the next decade. The report found that these students are preoccupied with health and family problems. Noting the longitudinal finding of a 67 percent graduation rate among former students in Head Start as contrasted to the 49 percent rate for a matched group not in the program, increased funding for successful early childhood programs is needed. Support is provided for programs which similarly emphasize parental involvement, such as the Beethoven Project and Parents as Teachers.

Partners in Growth: Elder Mentors and At-Risk Youth. Public/Private Ventures. Philadelphia, 1989.

This examination identifies the ability of mentorship programs to (1) forge critical connections between school and support services, (2) expand the range and capacity of educational programs for at-risk learners, (3) make the right match between people, their needs, and the programs designed to help them, (4) reduce the number of future at-risk learners by developing innovative and more effective early intervention and prevention approaches, and (5) build a more comprehensive and effective system for all youth and adults.

State Actions to Restructure Schools. National Governors' Association, Center for Policy Research. Washington, D.C., 1990.

This study suggests that generalized reform will occur within contexts emphasizing critical thinking, decentralization, training, risk-taking by principals, performance, block scheduling, an interdisciplinary curriculum, waivers for texts, learning blocks, teaming, staff development, reduced class sizes, and alternatives to Carnegie units. The recommended sequence of strategies for achieving such changes is to:

- promote a vision (especially through the use of task forces);
- spread the word by holding state and regional conferences;
- build statewide support through regular communications;
- invite school and district participation (especially through the use of pilot programs);
- provide flexibility (including the use of blanket waivers);
- acknowledge effort and provide time for change to being;
- offer technical assistance and networking;
- begin shifting the state role from mandates and compliance to goals and assistance;
- focus on results and accountability rather than processes; and
- maintain visibility for the changes as they occur.

The report concludes that if the "what" and "how" of instructional goals and curriculum are unchanged, restructuring will produce only minimal effects. The report also stresses the importance of integrating assess-

ment and accountability, flexibility, and authority, with professional training and staff development. Such change will move education beyond traditional barriers toward concepts such as coordinated interagency planning and leveraged funding.

Barriers to Excellence: Our Children At Risk. The National Coalition of Advocates for Students. Boston, 1985.

Within the context of racial, cultural, class, and sex discrimination, the barriers to educational excellence for all children identified in this report include:

- inflexibility of school structure;
- abuses of tracking and ability grouping;
- misuses of testing;
- narrowness of curriculum and teaching practices;
- limits of vocational education;
- lack of support services for youth;
- lack of early childhood programs;
- lack of democratic governance;
- lack of resources for schools;
- inequitable and insufficient financing; and
- limitations of the current job market.

In this report, schools are seen as central institutions in the ongoing effort to reverse the effects of economic deprivation and racial and cultural discrimination. The authors note that maintaining the level of support which characterized the effort of the early 1970s would have closed the gap by now. The report notes that Black males are placed in programs for the mildly mentally retarded at three times the Anglo rate. It also contains estimates of an 85 percent longitudinal dropout rate for Native Americans and 70 to 80 percent for Puerto Ricans. Additionally, 25 percent of teachers had limited English proficient students, but only 3 percent of these teachers had taken courses in teaching English as a second language.

The report further identifies inferior programming, lowered expectations, and damage to peer and school relationships in special classes, finding that, "the service delivery system which attaches labels to children in order to assure that money is spent on students of greatest need, also acts as an incentive to school districts to place more children in special classes, often inappropriately." Instead, such programs should be individually tailored to meet the needs of individual children. The importance of genuine parental participation in the movement from a model of school as factory to school as learning community is stressed. Specific recommendations are to reduce the effect of school size through a "house" system, extend Chapter 1 efforts to the secondary level, make middle-level education more like elementary than high school, and implement non-graded programs as alternatives to repeating grades at the elementary level. A general recommendation is that instruction be based upon active teaching, building on strengths, in mixed ability and multi-age groupings.

The report is based on the following maxims:

- If school is an unfriendly place that provides the protection of anonymity but offers little personal attention, support, or recognition, no amount of new curriculum will succeed;
- Schools are the social institutions with the greatest potential for identifying student needs and problems before they become overwhelming;

- If a system is based on control rather than on interaction, the results are apathy, alienation, and dropouts;
- The best school-to-work transition program in the world will only work if both ends of the transition have a solid foundation; and
- Funding for at-risk students will be insufficient if it is determined by the local tax base.

Better Schooling for the Children of Poverty: Alternatives to Conventional Wisdom. Study of Academic Instruction for Disadvantaged Students. USDE, Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation. January 1990.

This report challenges the conventional assumptions that deficit-based instruction delivered in heavily teacher-directed, uniformly managed environments within a curriculum emphasizing a hierarchy of discrete skills and long-term grouping of students by ability constitutes the best classroom practice for at-risk students. The recommended alternatives encompass a variety of management techniques, including combined teacher and learner inquiry, for applying skills learned in context in flexible grouping arrangements which emphasize meaning and understanding of both academic material and school culture.

STATE PLANS

The influence of major studies at the national level can be seen in plans developed at the state level in efforts to reform educational practice toward students at risk of dropping out of school.

Changing Schools and Communities: A Systemic Approach to Dropout Prevention. Massachusetts Department of Education Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. 1989.

The chief recommendations of this plan are to (1) promote systemic school change because it maximizes benefits to all groups, addresses root causes of dropping out, raises team building, and uses available rather than add-on funds; (2) support diversity of approaches within a school cluster since alternative schools mask system-wide reform and promote staff assignment by choice in small (350 students), interdisciplinary curriculum clusters; and (3) establish comprehensive input into policies for the following strategies: corrective rather than punitive discipline, in-school suspension, alternatives to non-promotion, contracted learning, accelerated learning, multi-age grouping, cross-age and peer tutoring, summer school, elimination of academic punishment for behavior, adequate counseling, flexible schedules, competency-based programs, and exit interviews.

The report recommended implementations within the following areas:

- School Organization—clustering, schools-within-schools, heterogeneous grouping, block scheduling, and common daily planning time;
- Thematic Units—diversity of learning styles, alternative assessment, and continuity of students having the same group of four or five teachers over two or more years;
- Student Support Services—developmental and preventive services, case management, mentor-advisor relationships, and developmental training;
- Dropout Recovery—career education, exposure to higher education, work study, job shadowing, and transitional support;
- Staff Development—socioeconomic, systematic school improvement, the range of opportunities, and differentiated staffing;
- Parental Involvement—access to formal structures, open door policies, diverse staff, positive feedback, non-school sites, and referral to support services;
- Community Support—representation by all school and community constituencies to assist in needs assessment, and a coordinated service delivery system to leverage resources;
- Partnerships—to promote employment and training, mentorships, and cooperative education programs;

- Higher Education/College Exposure; and
- Community Agencies—provision of counseling, medical and mental health services, child care, employment training and housing assistance, and recreational coordination.

The report recommends accomplishing the objectives through comprehensive teams, needs assessment toward identifying a common knowledge base, a review of data in view of community perceptions, and public meetings to develop plans and gain local support for implementation and evaluation.

***Maryland's Challenge: A Report of the Commission for Students at Risk.* 1990.**

This report is guided by the concept of adapting schools to the needs of children across age groups, beginning with the expectations that all children enter school fully prepared to learn, by attending to prenatal, nutrition, and medical care. A critical transition is from a small, safe, secure (and often neighborhood) elementary school to the larger, more complex environment of the middle grades. Transition to high school can be characterized by anonymity and an irrelevant curriculum prompting some students to physically disengage from the entire process. Recommendations include neighborhood-based, one-stop family investment centers; mandatory kindergarten; kindergarten through third grade constructed as a learning block; and middle schools with higher-order thinking and developmental life skills as an integral part of the curriculum.

Barriers within the school were identified as: a lack of respect for background and cultural differences; negative messages conveyed by school system policies and practices; large group instruction with little recognition of a diversity of learning styles; passive learning wherein only teachers set goals; sorting and tracking formalized by middle grades; retention without regard for the alienation it induces; the lack of middle school specialization for teachers; the physical factors, including large size, which shape the climate of high schools; tradition; and Band-Aid approaches at all levels.

The barriers can be reduced through actions based upon the principles that all students can succeed through a continuum of support and that school change is best accomplished by local, collaborative efforts supported at the state level. The vision accompanying this plan is for self-esteem and concern for others to guide academic achievement and lifelong learning by establishing basic skills in the early years, through the pressures of early adolescence, to guided preparation for the future in high school.

***Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students.* Iowa Department of Education. 1989.**

This plan is structured across strategies for identifying at-risk students; providing special instructional assistance, school-based support services, and appropriate counseling services; coordinating with community-based support services; involving parents; involving and providing inservice for all school personnel; complying with federal and state non-discrimination legislation; and monitoring behavioral, social, and academic improvements. State and local criteria for identifying at-risk students include poor attendance, suspension, lack of friends, dislike of school, social isolation, substance abuse, poor health, difficult transitions across grade levels, homelessness, chronic tardiness, transience, peer harassment, random course selection, and lack of future plans. Strategies include preschool, transition programs, parent helpers, computer-based learning centers, smaller class ratios, extended school day, evening school, summer school, community service, and cooperative and contractual classroom management. Services for specific needs include those of a speech pathologist, psychologist, social worker, nurse, academic consultant, audiologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and food services personnel.

***Reducing Dropouts in Ohio Schools: Guidelines and Promising Practices.* 1984.**

The process of structuring local efforts is an important aspect of this plan, which includes: (1) assessing the district's and students' needs; (2) developing measurable objectives and identifying possible approaches to encourage youth to remain in school; (3) identifying and assessing potential resources; (4) selecting approaches appropriate to students' needs and the district's and community's resources (5) designing

a formal plan and incorporating it into a staff development program for all personnel; (6) establishing a vehicle for exchanging, disseminating and centralizing ideas and approaches that work; (7) implementing the approaches in the plan; and (8) evaluating the activities.

GENERAL EDUCATION

Each state plan discussed can be said to reflect the general recommendations from national studies focusing upon solutions to the problem of students dropping out of school. The purpose of this section is to review the research literature toward recommendations concerning general education and across various grade levels.

Much of the direction taken in recent literature has, directly or indirectly, been determined by the concept of restructuring. The North Central Educational Laboratory's national teleconference series (1990) provided a synthesis of much of the research and practice and devoted a session to the topic of students at risk. Interviews with Hilliard (1986, 1989) and Jones (1987, 1989) emphasize the important difference school makes in children's lives with success envisioned as teachers interacting with parents in caring ways to promote student engagement in the learning process.

In Hilliard's research, early childhood education is not a vaccination for the later ills of tracking, retention, and pull-out programs which accomplish little but labeling in a fragmented curriculum focused upon disabilities. Hilliard stresses the importance of finding "the spark" for the cognitive/affective tie-in which taps the child's prior knowledge and creating within schools a common culture which is person-based rather than system-based. The effect of unity of purpose is to create the image for continuing "next steps" and genuine parental commitment to the educational bonds established. The solution values academic learning beyond basic skills instruction and emphasizes socialization as learning social values by focusing upon individual potential. The goal is to build authenticity in both curriculum and methodology, much as in holistic language teaching, since students are at risk because they are in "risky" environments, characterized by an uneven distribution of quality instruction. Working from the thesis that group learning is a basic human characteristic, Hilliard stresses the importance of abandoning a ranking/sorting custodial paradigm for appropriate, interpersonal, problem-solving, educational remediation.

Other researchers, including Garner and Alexander (1989), have examined academic disengagement by students as a means of adaptation and survival and have called for staff development (in topics such as attribution retraining, strategy and task matching, expert modeling, and guided practice in self-monitoring) as antidotes to competitive classrooms in which failure becomes self-protection.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Research in this area emphasizes the importance of early childhood education which is appropriately developmental and builds upon the strengths provided by the home environment to establish a positive attitude toward school culture. Adaptation by schools for quality education at the primary level in multi-grade classrooms has been based upon recommendations and directions established by the publication of the National Association of State Boards of Education Task Force on Early Childhood Education's *Right From the Start* in 1988.

In *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention*, Shepard and Smith (1989) note that retention at the primary level increases socioeconomic disadvantages. Retention rates of 2 to 3 percent per year are common and result in additional costs for reteaching students who are held back. Sklarz (1989) found the effect of single digit annual retention rates to translate to a cumulative retention rate of 54 percent in situations where nearly one-fourth of first graders have not been promoted. Dimidjian (1989) calls for removing artificial barriers of "care" and "education," establishing comprehensive early childhood programs staffed by personnel who are both certified in the area and advocates for young children, and

restructuring sites for children ages 1-8. Willer and Bredkamp (1990) note that gatekeeping of learning occurs only at school and is frequently based upon single observations in a restricted domain and criticize the use of easily measured performances in which success is based upon a willingness to be passive. The solution is found in comprehensive social and educational services which actively encourage parental involvement in individualized, child-initiated, small group, active learning, with access to variety of environmental resources to eradicate socioeconomic bias at the elementary level. The National Association of Elementary School Principals' report, *Early Childhood Education and the Elementary School Principal* (1990), recommends that education at the primary level contain minimal use of pull-out approaches, have physically open environments rich in stimuli, use groups not identified by grade, have an absence of readiness definitions of children, and hire teachers professionally trained especially for this age group.

At the upper elementary level, studies have focused upon evaluations of diverse practices. Slavin and Madden (1987) found that consistently effective classroom programs accommodate instruction to individual needs while maximizing direct instruction and frequently assessing student progress through a structured hierarchy of skills. The preliminary evaluation also contained an endorsement of cooperative learning and continuous progress models.

In a follow-up study, *What Works for Students At Risk: A Research Synthesis*, Slavin and Madden (1989) conducted an extensive survey in elementary schools and found that preschool in and of itself is not enough and must be followed by intensive first grade programs with tutors working with individuals and small groups. These practices can lead to enhanced achievement when followed by continuous progress and cooperative learning methodologies. Some supplementary remedial tutoring and computer-assisted instruction approaches demonstrated less effectiveness. The research synthesis endorses approaches which are comprehensive, intensive, and diagnostic. Madden, Slavin, and Livermon (1989) examined urban elementary schools and found that success for all students is best achieved when based upon prevention and immediate, intensive intervention. Additional findings supported one-to-one tutoring and reduced student/teacher ratios in homogeneous groups. Specific programs identified were Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), individualized assessment, the use of family support team (parental involvement) facilitators, inservice, and the continuous progress model for reading.

Levin (1987, 1988a, 1988b) and his colleagues (Barton, 1988; Richardson, 1988) have promoted the concept of the accelerated school, a transitional elementary school designed to have disadvantaged students on grade level by the end of sixth grade through heavily language-based environments, featuring reciprocal commitment by school and parents and the use of volunteers in an extended school day.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

The transition to middle school and junior high school campuses marks the beginning of the period when school success begins to be measured by the rate at which students physically abandon schooling. Recent research has provided specific suggestions for reform to adapt to the needs of students in this age group. Advocates (Wheelock and Dornan, 1988; Massachusetts Advocacy Council, 1990) stress the importance of programs at this level which contain heterogeneous grouping, integration of disabilities, cultural and linguistic diversity, assessment for development rather than readiness, individualized assessment, organization toward de-tracking, team teaching, and parent education.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development study, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), recommends that education at this level: (1) create small communities—schools within schools or "houses"—for learning where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth, student and teacher teaming, and small group advisories, ensuring that every student is known well by at least one adult; (2) teach a core academic program including scientific literacy, critical thinking, health, ethics, and citizenship in a pluralistic society, including youth service; (3) ensure success for all students by eliminating tracking by achievement level and promoting cooperative learning, flexibility in arranging instructional time,

and adequate resources (time, space, equipment, and materials) for teachers; (4) empower teacher and administrator decisions for creative control by teachers over the instructional program, linking greater responsibilities for students' performance, governance committees that assist the principal, and autonomy and leadership within subschools or houses; (5) staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents and who have been specifically prepared for assignment to the middle grades; (6) improve academic performance by fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents, by providing a health coordinator in every middle grade school, access to health care and counseling services, and a health-promoting school environment; (7) re-engage families with meaningful roles in school governance, communicating with families about the school program and student's progress, and offering opportunities to support the learning process at home and at the school; and (8) connect schools with communities, identifying service opportunities, partnerships and collaborations for ensuring access to health and social services and opportunities for constructive after-school activities.

SENIOR HIGH TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Studies of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery methods for youth of secondary school age emphasize a diversity of both systemic changes and alternative solutions. There is a general consensus that the complexity of young adulthood in contemporary society interacts with the expected departure from public schooling, whether by graduating or dropping out, to produce the need for a variety of adaptive strategies.

Gamoran (1990), in examining curriculum tracking, ability grouping and achievement, found that higher achieving students get more, and low achieving students less, quality instruction; that tracking widens the gap between high and low achievers; and that the use of noncollege tracks does not keep students in school. The study also suggests that it is not tracking, but the expectations and rigidity which accompany it, that is the problem.

Weber (1988, p. 24) reports the finding that among high school students, well over 75 percent take at least one vocational course, and that such programs offer a clear alternative to students who have difficulty thriving in a traditional academic environment. The identified factors include: "the hands-on, performance-oriented approach typically found in vocational classrooms; the way instruction is tied to the workplace; the emphasis on individual and small group activities; the task-oriented, interpersonal communication; the opportunities for reinforcing basic skills; the necessity for making decisions and working toward reachable goals; and the opportunities to experience success."

Wehlage and his colleagues (1989) studied 14 schools which have instituted a range of dropout prevention strategies and found that schools successful at dropout prevention created a supportive environment that helped students overcome impediments to membership and engagement. Three goals were identified for policy recommendations: (1) to encourage the development of more and stronger alternatives for students; (2) to promote systemic school reform; and (3) to establish a community partnership strategy of intervention. The schools reflected beliefs that high quality alternatives are necessary to respond to the variety of risk factors affecting youth. They provide motivation of academic effort for noncollege-bound students for whom course work appears to have little relation to the world of work and for whom high academic achievement has little effect in entry-level employment. Common to all the programs were adult guidance for personal problems, vocational experiences, and a curriculum of child development studies for teen parents. Systemic reform and community involvement were based upon disaggregated data constructed from correlates of dropping out. Of critical importance were alternative educators capable of providing high quality education, exploring innovative models, conducting staff development for regular programs, and increasing diffusion of curricular innovations. The study is a useful summary of the approach to the problem provided by Wehlage and his colleagues (Wehlage, 1986; Wehlage, Rutter and Turbaugh, 1987).

In describing the potential of high school counseling programs to provide solutions to the problem of school dropouts, Kushman and Kinney (1990) provide an important contrast between clinical and systemic models. The weakness of clinical approaches is identified as the time and effort spent attempting to resolve social and psychological issues which are difficult, if not impossible, to alter. The mismatches between students and educational programs are said to reside within the students, in pathologies which must be "fixed." In a systemic approach, barriers residing in organizational structures, procedural practices, instructional strategies, and educational inequity, factors intrinsic to the school, are identified and reduced or eliminated. The school system structures itself, "to work cooperatively with social service agencies without, however, becoming a social agency." Within programmatic efforts at the high school level, Newman (1989, p. 34) identifies principles which are in accord with systemic models: "educators can motivate students to achieve if they fulfill students' needs for competence, external rewards, intrinsic interest, social support, and sense of ownership." In this model for promoting student engagement, the focus is shifted to positive and pragmatic progress.

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

- (1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;
- (2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;
- (3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;
- (4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;
- (5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;
- (6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and
- (7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, 1973 EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED IN 1974.

It is the policy of the Texas Education Agency to comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or handicap constitute a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency makes positive efforts to employ and advance in employment all protected groups.



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